

Voter ID law tested during primary elections

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By Kayla Mulliniks / Published April 16, 2014

Texas’ new voter ID law had little to no effect on the 2014 primary elections, but a variety of political leaders say the true test will be in the general election.

The 2014 Texas primary elections were the second statewide elections where the **Texas voter ID law** was enforced.

The statewide, combined Republican and Democrat turnout was **6.63 percent** this year, an increase compared to the **5.09 percent** turnout in 2012.

Democratic and Republican leaders agreed that **the 109** is primarily white and middle to upper class, so the voter ID law should not affect them.

“It will mostly effect people in poverty stricken, rural or inner-city areas,” said Lico Reyes, founding president of the League of United Latin American Citizens of Tarrant County.

Despite the voter ID law’s having little to no effect on the 109, Tarrant County Commissioner Roy Brooks said 109 residents should continue to be aware of the law and the issues surrounding it.

Brooks has been actively speaking out against the law since it was passed in 2011.

Brooks said he believes that the voter ID law is unconstitutional and works to take the vote away from African-Americans and Hispanics.

Tarrant County Election Administrator Steve Raborn said he was unaware of any complaints made about the law during the primary elections.

“Everyone seems to understand what the acceptable IDs are,” Raborn said.

“There’s always going to be hiccups in a new system, but there were a lot of notices sent out,” he said. “Everyone did well in spreading the word.”

James Riddlesperger, a TCU political science professor, said although the new law seemed to run smoothly during the primaries, this election might not show how the law will pan out during a general election.

“I think the primaries really don’t test the law very well because turnout is low, and only the most politically engaged participate,” he said. “Those who participate in primaries are unlikely to have problems with IDs.”

Ann McClure, president of the Tarrant County Democratic Woman’s Club, said she has been following the law closely since 2012 and was “very alarmed and concerned” when the law had passed.

“I picked up on the fact that this law could easily disenfranchise women and their vote,” she said. “Most people will use their traditional driver’s license, but I knew my maiden name was on my voter registration.”

According to the voter ID law, whichever of **the seven acceptable IDs** voters choose to use must exactly match the name on their voter registration card.

Fran Rhodes, coordinator for the North East Tarrant County Tea Party’s Liaison and Citizen Lobbyist groups, said the law is a necessity for ensuring people who show up to vote are eligible and who they claim to be.

“I don’t really understand why people are so against it. In our culture we have thousands of things we need a proper ID for,” she said. “I just don’t buy that it is a threat to the minority or woman’s vote.”

“I almost find it an insult to these groups – it’s like they’re saying people like you aren’t smart enough to get the right type of ID,” she said.

Rhodes also said if people had issues with their ID when they went out to vote, they have the option to vote provisionally.

Voting provisionally allows the voter to cast their vote, but it would not be counted unless they brought an acceptable ID within a certain time period, depending on the date they voted.

McClure, who worked early voting and Election Day during the primaries, said she had noticed that potential provisional voters were discouraged by the time period they had to bring an acceptable ID.

“One woman who came in to vote recently moved back to Fort Worth,” she said. “She was in the process of changing all of her information and IDs and only had a temporary Texas ID. She didn’t know if her actual ID would be ready in time for her to bring it back within the allotted time period, so this could be a potential problem for many people.”

McClure and Rhodes agreed that the true test of the voter ID law would be in the next general election.

Brooks said that the primary elections did not show what he considers the law’s true flaws.

“Yes, there were more early voters in this election, but look who they were, mainly Republicans,” Brooks said. “This law isn’t aimed toward them. It is aimed to suppress the African American and Hispanic vote, which is mainly Democratic.”

Brooks is not the only one with reservations -- the U.S. Department of Justice believes the voter ID law is unconstitutional.

The U.S. Department of Justice argued the law violated the Voting Rights Act in a **lawsuit filed** in August. The Voting Rights Act requires states to clear any changes in their voting laws with the federal government.

However, the Supreme Court struck down **section 4 of the Voting Rights Act**, allowing Texas to continue enforcing the voter ID law.

Brooks continues to speak out against the law.

“Even if the law doesn’t directly effect you, it’s something to be concerned about,” he said. “Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.”

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